Book review

Andrew Basden: *The Foundations of Information Systems: Research and Practice (Routledge Studies in Innovation, Organization and Technology)*
(London: Routledge, 2018) ISBN 978-1138797017, hbk, £110.00, pp xxviii + 433

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What does a dead, white, early-twentieth-century Dutch philosopher have to do with twenty-first-century information systems? Plenty, according to Andrew Basden, Professor of Human Factors and Philosophy in Information Systems at University of Salford, Manchester, UK. He has written this book to show why.

The philosopher is Herman Dooyeweerd. Dooyeweerd was the pioneer of a Christian philosophy that has been described as opaque and irrelevant. Basden provides a helpful overview of Dooyeweerd's, admittedly dense and complex, philosophy — showing that it doesn't necessarily have to be opaque. He then goes on to apply it to the area of information systems (IS) — showing that it, certainly when it comes to IS, is not irrelevant.

Information systems is a very broad academic discipline, it comprises hardware, software and data and includes the design and implementation of computer languages, data models, hardware and software; it is far more than computers, word processing and spreadsheets. It includes data management, data security, data distribution; it is not only the components but also the roles that they play in society. Here Basden focuses on five key ideas: the nature of ICT, its use, features, impact on society and its development.

What Basden seems to appreciate most about Dooyeweerd's philosophy is that he starts with everyday experience. Consequently, Basden deals with topics that might be thought tangential to an academic discipline — topics such as computer games and procrastination. He even utilises Dooyeweerd's modal aspects to evaluate the dice game Yahtzee and computer games such as ZAngband (Table 6.3, pp. 186-188).

In essence, what Basden is doing here is to provide a new research paradigm for Information Systems based on Dooyeweerd's philosophy. He clearly shows time and again how fruitful this approach can be in making sense of IS and how it can open up new research areas. Chapter 10, for example, provides over 100 suggestions for research projects that could be undertaken using Dooyeweerd's ideas.

The scope of the book is immense. Ranging from an introduction to, and application of, Dooyeweerd's philosophy to discussing the different reasons and uses for pdf, jpeg and gif file formats, to examining philosophers such as Aristotle, Gadamer, Polanyi and Habermas. It has over 40 tables and over 20 figures.

There are a few minor quibbles I have with the book – but these are more of a presentation style than content. There is an overuse of acronyms – for example, EIT, EMC, ELI, a glossary of these would have been helpful. The bibliography appears at the end of each chapter and not at the end – I would have appreciated a full bibliography at the end of the book. There are helpful 'notes on terminology' defining key terms in the text but an appendix of these would have been valuable.

Basden is well informed with a range of other philosophers. He constantly shows comparisons between philosophers such as Kant, Husserl, Habermas and Bhaskar, and Dooyeweerd. For those familiar with philosophy and philosophical schools this is a great advantage but for those not, it can complicate some of the key issues.

Basden has consistently used what he terms the LACE approach (listen, affirm, critique and enrich) in his work, and this is exemplified in this book; his approach is not adversarial. This does not mean an uncritical approach. Basden rejects Kuyper's antithesis as his starting point (94). This means connections can be made with other thinkers rather than adopt an adversarial attitude, which he maintains, the Kuyperian antithesis can breed. He recognises that Dooyeweerdian and immanence thought have radically different religious starting points but should not be antithetical to each other.

As he has written elsewhere:

> Christian thinking is used to account for and enrich the world's thinking by transplanting it from its current ground-motive (usually that of nature-freedom) into the arguably more fertile soil of the creation-fall-redemption ground-motive (Basden, 2008. Engaging with and Enriching Humanist Thought: The Case of Information Systems. *Philosophia Reformata*, 73(2):132).

This is exactly what he does in this book.

Basden does not blindly follow Dooyeweerd; he is not afraid to adapt his ideas and evaluates several criticisms of him (§11-4.3).

Why is Dooyeweerd's approach so fruitful for ICT and IS? Part of the answer is that they are interdisciplinary fields and Dooyeweerd's approach is a good fit for that. Other fields tend to reduce down and focus on one aspect so Dooyeweerd's approach is too broad: it is anti-reductionistic. Another part is that Basden has for over thirty years worked out how to apply Dooyeweerd's philosophy to IS. This book is the fruit of that hard work. It provides a framework and the template for other Christian academics to do the same in their fields.